

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 /026 W
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O 151520Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8656

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4630

EXDIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE SY US

SUBJ: EVACUATION FROM LEBANON

REF: STATE 174984

1. MET WITH KHADDAM AT 1330L TO REQUEST SYRIAN ADVICE
AND ASSISTANCE CONCERNING UPCOMING EVACUATION. AFTER HEARING
ME OUT, HE MADE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON OUR VARIOUS ROUTES.

A. BEIRUT AIRPORT INADVISABLE; KHADDAM SAID THAT DAMASCUS
ONLY HAS DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE MARONITE LEADERSHIP
WHEN ITS REPRESENTATIVES ARE IN DAMASCUS. ALL COMMUNICATIONS
WITH JOUNIEH OTHERWISE HAD TO BE IN WRITING. HE WAS, THERE-
FORE, UNABLE TO ASSURE US THAT ALL MARONITE PARTIES WHOSE
COORDINATION WOULD BE NECESSARY COULD BE ADVISED IN TIME
SHOULD WE DECIDE TO USE BEIRUT AIRPORT FOR JULY 20 EV-
ACUATION. A MARONITE DELEGATION HAD RETURNED TO JOUNIEH ONLY
YESTERDAY; BUT UNLESS A CARONITE VISITOR ARRIVES IN THE NEXT
48 HOURS, AND NONE IS EXPECTED, HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GET THE
ASSURANCES WE SEEK. KHADDAM THEN COUNSELED STRONGLY AGAINST
USE OF BEIRUT AIRPORT, IN TERMS SIMILAR TO THOSE USED BY
SHIHABI WHEN I DISCUSSED ITS USE WITH HIM LAST MONTH.

"ANY MADMAN WITH A MISSILE COULD WIPE OUT YOUR AIRCRAFT."

THIS, KHADDAM SAID, WOULD APPLY EVEN IF SYRIA WAS ABLE TO GET

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TIMELY MARONITE GUARANTEES.

B. OVERLAND CONVOY: IF WE DECIDE TO USE THE OVERLAND CONVOY, SYRIA WILL FULLY COOPERATE AS IT HAS IN THE PAST. HE THOUGHT STATIONING OF A GASOLINE TRUCK AT SOME POINT IN THE BEKAA VALLEY WOULD BE FEASIBLE. I SHOULD CONTACT HIM AGAIN ON THIS ONCE WE HAD REACHED OUR DECISION ON THE TRAVEL ROUTE.

C. SIDON PORT EVACUATION: SYRIA WILL HAVE COMPLETED ITS MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SIDON VICINITY BY EVENING JULY 15. IT WILL, THEREFORE, NOT BE IN A POSITION TO OFFER US COOPERATION TO PROTECT OUR PASSENGERS SHOULD WE ELECT A SEA DEPARTURE FROM SIDON.

D. PORT EVACUATION FROM BEIRUT: HE MADE NO COMMENT.

2. KHADDAM SAID HE PERSONALLY WOULD RECOMMEND AS THE SAFEST EVACUATION ROUTE THAT, WE USE HELICOPTERS FROM RAMLAT AL-BAYDA, SPORT CITY AREA. I SAID USE OF HELICOPTERS HAD BEEN CONSIDERED FOR LAST MONTH'S MAJOR EVACUATION. ONE REASON ADDUCED AGAINST THEIR USE WOULD BE EXPOSURE AND VULNERABILITY TO SNIPER FIRE. KHADDAM ASSERTED THIS WOULD NOT BE A PROBLEM IN THE RAMLAT AL-BAYDA AREA. HELICOPTERS COULD TAKE EVACUEES EITHER TO A SHIP OFF SHORE OR DIRECTLY TO CYPRUS.

3. HE THEN COMMENTED THAT HE INTERPRETED MY APPROACH TO HIM AS A SIGN THAT THE USG CONSIDERED THAT THINGS WERE GOING TO GET FAR WORSE IN BEIRUT. I REPLIED THAT HE SHOULD NOT SO INTERPRET IT. WE WERE NOT PREDICTING A DISASTER ANY WORSE THAN THE CONDITIONS PREVAILING TODAY. AS I HAD SAID, OUR EMBASSY PERSONNEL ARE FACING GROWING RISKS AND OPERATING CONDITIONS ARE ALREADY ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. WE WERE ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE FATE OF OUR PRIVATE CITIZENS STILL IN BEIRUT, WHOM WE ESTIMATE TO NUMBER SEVERAL HUNDREDS. HEALTH CONDITIONS WERE DETERIORATING, ELECTRICITY AND WATER SHORTAGES WERE PLAGUING THE CITY. FOR ALL OF THESE REASONS WE WOULD BE ISSUING A STRONG RECOMMENDATION FOR OUR COMMUNITY TO LEAVE DURING THE COMING WEEK.

4. KHADDAM THEN REFERRED TO ON-GOING RUSH CONSTRUCTION OF TWO
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NEW AIRPORTS, ONE IN THE SHOUF DISTRICT UNDER JUMBLATT'S DIRECTION AND ANOTHER MORE ELABORATE ONE IN THE HILLS SOUTH OF SIDON. EIGHTEEN HUNDRED METERS OF THE SECOND ONE HAD ALREADY BEEN COMPLETED AND THE WHOLE PROJECT WOULD BE COMPLETED IN A FEW DAYS. I SAID WE HAD HEARD OF THE LATTER PROJECT (SEPTEL). HE ASKED IF OUR PLANNED EVACUATION WAS PROVOKED BY OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THESE PROJECTS. I REPLIED THAT NO SINGLE FACTOR HAD STIMULATED OUR PLANNING.

5. COMMENT: KHADDAM KEPT TRYING TO READ INTO OUR EVACUATION PLANNING A POLITICAL SIGNAL FROM US TO SYRIA. I DOUBT I SUCCEEDED IN DISSUADING HIM NONE WAS INTENDED.

6. OF THE FOUR ALTERNATIVES DISCUSSED WITH KHADDAM, THE ONLY ONE TO WHICH HE RESPONDED POSITIVELY WAS AN OVERLAND CONVOY TO DAMASCUS. AS REPORTED SEPTTEL, I WAS TOLD EARLIER TODAY BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR THAT SYRIA HAD AGREED TO WITHDRAW ITS FORCES FROM SIDON ON CONDITION THEY WOULD BE IMMEDIATELY REPLACED BY JOINT ARAB FORCES (BEIRUT 6255 NOTES SYRIAN FORCES MAY BE INCLUDED.) KHADDAM MADE NO REFERENCE TO THIS. SHOULD WE ELECT EVACUATION BY HELICOPTER, I DEFER TO EMBASSY BEIRUT'S EVALUATION OF SECURITY IN THE RAMLAT AL-BAYDA AREA.

7. I CONSIDER KHADDAM'S EXPLANATION ABOUT DIFFICULTY OF COMMUNICATING WITH MARONITES TO BE A LITTLE TOO PAT. IT MAY REFLECT SYRIA'S DETERMINATION NOT TO BE PAINTED AS HAVING SPECIAL ACCESS TO ANY ONE FACTION IN LEBANON. HE DID, HOWEVER, AGREE WHEN I PRESSED HIM TO ENSURE THAT OUR MESSAGE WOULD BE PASSED SHOULD THERE BE ANY PERSONAL CONTACTS WITH THE MARONITE LEADERSHIP IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO.
MURPHY

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